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The History and Philosophy of the Center on Animal Liberation Affairs
by Animals Liberation Philosophy and Policy Journal, Editorial Board

When a liberation movement attains a significant level of influence and success, invariably it becomes an object of serious political, historical, and philosophical discussion. In the past, this has happened with organizations such as the Black Panther Party, the Irish Republican Army, The Basques, the Japanese Red Army, the African National Congress, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation, and the Zapatistas. Whether in favorable or critical terms, all have been written about in countless books and articles and are now an important part of social history.

The time is ripe for the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) also to receive serious scholarly attention. Since its inception in England in the 1970s, its migration to the United States in the 1980s, and the subsequent spread of ALF cells around the world, the ALF has racked up an impressive record of successes for the cause of animal liberation. They have broken into hundreds of laboratories, factory farms, fur farms, and other hellholes of animal exploitation to liberate tens of thousands of animals that otherwise didn't have a chance. They have inflicted millions of dollars of property damage on institutions of animal exploitation in order to slow down or shut down their blood-stained operations. They have inspired countless activists with their courage and conviction. They surely have captured the attention of the FBI who, in the age of the Patriot Act, elevated them and the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) to the top two "domestic terrorist" groups in the nation. And so long as animals are being maimed, poisoned, burned, confined, tortured, and murdered at the hands of butchers in white coats or in search of greenbacks, the ALF is here to stay.

Two years ago a vision for CALA began to form throughout the academic animal rights activist community. Academic animal rights activists realized that the animal liberation movement needed not only activists working in anonymous cells but also the above ground presence of scholars, writers, teachers, and professors. Radical practice needs radical theory, and without others to write the history of the ALF, to clarify its ethical principles, and to support its politics, the practice might not be accorded the integrity it deserves. Considering the kind of intellectual presence that Ward Churchill brought to the American Indian Movement, or that Subcomandante Marcos achieved for the Zapatistas, they saw a need for such writers and intellectual voices to represent the animal liberation movement.

It was important, that those who would learn about the ALF be able to correctly understand and contextualize their actions. If the public learned that the ALF has supporters other than their stereotyped images of young punks with spiked purple hair, nose rings, and combat boots, and that -- in their perceptions -- there are other people explaining and defending animal liberation with strong logical positions, then the ALF could gain the popular support it needs to grow as a mature liberation movement. Rather than marginalized to obscure zines and secret email lists, there could be books, articles, journals, and conferences discussing the ALF in the most serious manner and bringing ALF actions and ideas to new audiences such as university students, the literati, and community forums.

The first step was to find other academics (a notoriously conservative and tepid lot) to support open dialogue about the ALF, and then to find a way to create and institutionalize a new community. Anthony J. Nocella II sent out a call for papers on the topic of the Animal Liberation Front with the aim of having them published in an anthology. During this process he met Dr. Steve Best, chair of the philosophy department at the University of Texas, El Paso, and a well-known author and animal activist. While it was Anthony who organized the notion of the academic animal rights activist community, it was Steve who spoke and wrote eloquently about the plight of animals and the just cause of fighting for their rights and liberation. After many months of working together to collect and edit contributions from some of the leading voices for animal liberation, they sent the manuscript to Lantern Books. *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters? Reflections on the Liberation of Animals* (forthcoming, fall 2003), is a groundbreaking volume. It is the first collection of essays on the ALF, and it brings together historical documents, both activists and academic perspectives, and an appendix of direct action resources.

In the process of finishing the volume, Anthony and Steve discovered that there were a number of academics concerned with the ethics, history, and politics of animal liberation as issues worthy of serious and professional discussion. There was enough interest throughout the country to prompt them to develop an academically-oriented animal liberation research and advocacy organization. They named it the Center for Animal Liberation Affairs, created a website and email list, and began to organize an editorial and advisory board to be served by prominent academics, doctors, lawyers, and researchers committed to analysis and support of the ALF. It must be mentioned that no one in CALA is a member of the ALF, or likely even knows anyone in the ALF. Rather, CALA members are professionals who lend their skills, support, and institutional positions to discuss the ALF and its profound social and historical significance.

With the book in production, the membership growing, and the FBI beginning to launch its neo-McCarthyist witch-hunt against animal rights activists, CALA organized its first conference, the appropriately-titled “One Struggle” conference in Houston, Texas in December 2002. The conference was a one day event designed to bring together representatives from numerous human and animal rights and liberation organizations. The differences in perspectives were taken for granted; the idea was to explore the commonalities among various types of human and animal oppression. Conference speakers included activists and academics representing animal rights, eco-feminism, the American Indian Movement, the Anarchist Black Cross, and feminism in the IRA. Panels discussed topics such as the nature of the Patriot Act, FBI harassment of activists, the relation between human and animal oppression, veganism, Earth First!, and mothers in social movements. In the level of discussion, the learning promoted, the understanding of what liberation movements share in common, and the alliances forged, the conference was a success. It was there, for example, CALA members developed a stimulating relationship with American Indian Movement members, particularly Lawrence Sampson, a current CALA board-member.

In February 2003, during three infamous days, the seeds planted by members of CALA to organize a conference discussing the ALF and ELF came to life at California State University, Fresno. The conference was carried forward with the untiring assistance of Fresno professor Mark Somma, chair of the Political Science Department, and Mike Becker, political science professor. Former members and spokespersons of the ALF and ELF, Earth First! activists, Paul

Watson of the Sea Shepard Conservation Society, and pro-liberation academics such as Rik Scarce, Bron Taylor, and Steve Best provided the star billing for an unprecedented conference on “Radical Environmentalism.” In harmony with the vision of CALA, the activists and academics addressed numerous student classes and faculty workshops, spoke in morning and afternoon panels, and participated in an evening community forum attended by over 600 people.

The provocation of inviting to a conservative agricultural university and community notorious figures like Rod Coronado, Gary Yourofsky, Craig Rosebrough, and Paul Watson, all of whom have been in jail or persecuted for rescuing or liberating animals, did not go unnoticed by the media. When the conference was over, people with an open mind learned much about the plight of animals and why some activists go outside the law in pursuit of a higher ethical norm that commands all of us to help the animal nation crying out in pain. The conference provoked a national firestorm of controversy that still rages in Fresno and that demonstrated how future conferences spotlighting animal and earth liberation issues could work as constructive education and debate forums.

For about a year, CALA focused only on dialogue about the ALF with other academics. Hoping that Terrorists or Freedom Fighters? would accomplish much along these lines, we subsequently decided to develop CALA into a full-blown scholarly center. We added two new aspects to the organization: the Conference Committee and the Animal Liberation Philosophy and Policy Journal. Since that time the board has grown to include a number of new colleagues.

The Journal editors are senior editor Dr. Steve Best, Dr. Stephen R. Kaufman, Dr. Anuj Shah J.D., Jason Edward Black, Jennifer Laurie Black, Richard Kahn, and Dr. Matthew Calarco. The Conference Committee is comprised of chair Anthony J. Nocella II, Lawrence Sampson, Sunshine Swallers, and Michael Greger M.D.. Richard Kahn established the Animal Liberation Philosophy/Policy Syllabi collection the first of its kind. Sunshine Swallers initiated the Civil Liberties Controversy Database, an extensive archive of articles, links, and groups as they relate to the attack on civil liberties in the era of the Patriot Act. Matthew Calarco heads up the Animal Liberation Philosophy and Policy E-Groups, a scholarly online discussion group, and Matthew also is organizing CALA’s Animal Liberation Philosophy and Policy Conference the first of its kind, which will be held in 2004 at Sweet Briar College. Anthony J. Nocella II has begun efforts to launch an “Academic Awareness Day on the Animal Liberation Front.” A key purpose of this action is to de-escalate the frustrations that some people feel in response to extreme tactics in the animal rights movement. The goal is to learn more about why the ALF originated, their goals and nonviolent philosophy, and how they are viewed by opposing groups both inside and outside of the animal advocacy movement.

Each individual within our collective has contributed to our mission in their own unique and important way. It is with great pleasure that we invite you to read our first issue of the Animal Liberation Philosophy and Policy Journal, the only strictly animal liberation journal in the world. While that is a great responsibility, it is something that our staff and board can shoulder. Our hope with this journal is to initiate academic programs that concentrate on the study of the philosophy and policy of animal liberation. We invite you to contribute to the Journal, to support CALA’s goals, and to become an active part of the new liberation movements.